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On Other Pages

US Southern Presbyterians Approve Anti-Segregation Stand.	Page 3
Roman Catholic Official Answers Birth Control Criticism	Page 4
Two WCC Homes for Hungarian Refugee Youth Opened in Austria . . .	Page 4
French Students Draw Up Algerian Statement.	Page 5
WSCF Holds Executive Meeting.	Page 5
Mixed Marriages in United Kingdom	Page 6

Report from Germany

Dibelius Points Up German Church Problems	Page 8
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German Church Unity Strengthened by National Synod

(Berlin) - At its four-day session, which ended on April 30 in Berlin, the All-German Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany spoke out on Christian education, confirmation of youth, the use of atomic weapons and the need for spiritual care for members of the armed forces (see EPS No. 17).

The Synod asked for a general ban on war and the abolition of nuclear as well as "conventional" weapons. A resolution drawn up by a fifty-seven-member Commission on Atomic Weapons said:

"In agreement with the resolutions passed by the World Council of Churches in New Haven in the summer of 1957, the Synod rejects total warfare waged with weapons of mass destruction as incompatible with man's conscience in the sight of God.

"The Synod urges all responsible politicians to do their utmost to bring about general disarmament, not only with atomic weapons, but also with "conventional" weapons. It urges the world powers to stop atom bomb tests once and for all. In our divided country it urges both governments to do their utmost to secure freedom of faith and of conscience, to serve the cause of peace, and to avoid arming German soldiers with atomic weapons.

"Deep differences exist among us in our view of atomic weapons. Some of us are convinced that the production and possession of weapons of mass destruction of any kind is a sin before God. Others think that in certain situations

Christians are justified in using such weapons for purposes of defence.

"We remain united in the Gospel and are endeavouring to overcome these differences of conviction. We pray God to lead us through His Word to a united perception of what is right and to a united decision."

The chairman of the commission was Professor L. Raiser, a lawyer from Tübingen, and members included Klaus von Bismarck of the Church of Westphalia, President Joachim Beckmann of the Church in the Rhineland, Bishop Otto Dibelius, president of the Council of the EKD, Dr. Eugen Gerstenmaier, president of the lower house in the West German parliament, Dr. Gustav Heinemann, Professor Hans Iwand of Bonn, General Superintendent Günter Jacob of Cottbus, Professor Walter Künneth of Erlangen, Dr. Gottfried Noth, Bishop of Saxony, Dr. Reinold von Thadden, and Professor Heinrich Vogel of East Berlin. Professor Helmut Gollwitzer took part in the discussions as a consultant.

Synod Considers Education Problems

Looking at the problems of Christian education, the Synod accepted a series of basic declarations on the subject. But to prevent the use of the material for propaganda purposes and in the press, it decided not to hold public debate on the problems of education in the German Democratic Republic.

At the same time, the Synod named three members to meet with President Otto Grotewohl, DDR prime minister, and discuss the concern of Christians in East Germany about the education of their children.

In a resolution dealing with freedom in schools, Synod members urged that no teacher should be punished or rewarded for giving or not giving religious instruction in the classroom. If correctly understood, the Synod said, freedom in schools leaves room for instruction in the Protestant faith.

New Confirmation Regulations Sought

The Synod unanimously asked the leaders of its member churches in West and East Germany to set up new regulations governing Confirmation. The statement requested the churches "not to be afraid of new ways, but to make very serious efforts to preserve the fellowship between the churches within the EKD". A coordinating committee will be set up before October 1 to try to ensure that Confirmation regulations are made standard by all the regional churches.

During the debate on the subject, Dr. Andler, a member of the Berlin church's consistory, drew attention to the difficulties of the church in East Germany, and said: "It would be wrong to cling to the old procedure and in face of the menace of atheism to close one's eyes and confirm everyone who asks for it. In the future there will be quite a lot of young people who may have taken part in the youth dedication ceremonies but who have come to a true fellowship of faith and now want to testify that they are converted to God. Therefore, in the future, the traditional age for Confirmation will not be the only time a person can be confirmed. Young people will be able to be confirmed later, after preparatory instruction."

Military Chaplaincy to Be Regional Church Responsibility

Turning to the controversial question of chaplains for the armed forces, the Synod named a commission to work out ways to put the responsibility for spiritual care in the armed forces exclusively in the hands of the regional churches.

Bishop Hanns Lilje said that the only purpose of the Agreement on Spiritual Care in the Armed Forces, passed last year by the Synod, is "to enable the Gospel to be preached and spiritual care to be given to the Protestant members

of the armed forces. It is not linked up with any political aims. And authorities outside the Church have no influence on the work of military chaplains."

The agreement, Bishop Lilje said, applies only to member churches in West Germany which have voted for it. It does not apply to Evangelical churches in the DDR and has not been accepted by any members of the EKD in East Germany.

"The decision of the Bundestag on March 25," Bishop Lilje continued, "leaves the door open to the arming of German soldiers with atomic weapons, if all efforts for universal disarmament with proper inspection should fail. The Synod therefore considers it imperative for the member churches to consider the consequences this would have for spiritual care in the armed forces."

Synod Hears Report by Bishop Dibelius

In his report to the opening session of the Synod on April 24, Bishop Dibelius had reviewed church problems in both East and West Germany, and outlined points of conflict between the Church and the East German government.

(For excerpts from the bishop's statement, see "Report from Germany" on Page 8.)

The Synod was attended by 120 members, forty of them from Eastern Germany.

E.P.S., Geneva

US Southern Presbyterians Approve Anti-Segregation Stand

(Charlotte, North Carolina) - The Presbyterian Church in the US (Southern) has reaffirmed its stand against racial segregation.

At its ninety-eighth General Assembly last week in Charlotte, North Carolina, delegates overwhelmingly opposed the use of church buildings as classrooms to circumvent compliance with the United States Supreme Court ruling against segregation in public schools.

The assembly said that to use church facilities in such a way was "not proper". At the same time, the delegates endorsed a previous Assembly's approval of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling.

The action was approved when delegates voted 288 to 124 in favour of a majority report presented by the church's Standing Committee on Christian Relations.

In accepting the report, the Assembly also backed the denomination's Council on Christian Relations in its opposition to segregation and in its liberal views on other social issues. Five presbyteries in Mississippi, Alabama and South Carolina had asked that the council be abolished.

In other action, the assembly approved "guiding principles" on civil rights. One was that a Christian's conscience "cannot rest content" when people are branded as inferiors, are denied their full citizenship rights because of race, colour or social status, or are prevented from developing "to the fullest possible extent the potentialities they, as individuals, have been endowed with by the Creator".

Earlier, the church's retiring moderator, the Rev. William M. Elliott Jr., had warned that Southern Presbyterians must not stand aloof from other Protestant denominations in "spiritual pride and isolation".

Dr. Elliott said he was not asking for "indiscriminate" organic union across every denominational line. "What I am pleading for," he said, "is something deeper down - something more primary and important, and that is a sense of comradeship with all who own Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord."

New moderator of the church is Philip F. Howerton, a layman. Dr. James A. Millard Jr., a homiletics professor at Austin (Texas) Seminary, was elected Stated Clerk of the church, and will succeed Dr. E.C. Scott, who retires in 1959 after holding the post for twenty-two years. E.P.S., Geneva

Roman Catholic Official Answers Birth Control Criticism

(Washington, D.C.) - A Roman Catholic official in the United States has answered criticism by Dr. Richard M. Fagley, executive secretary of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, of the birth control stand of the Roman Catholic church (see EPS No. 16).

Speaking to the annual meeting of the US Conference for the World Council of Churches in April, Dr. Fagley had called the Roman Catholic attitude on the matter "theologically wrong and practically tragic".

Replying to the speech, the Rev. John E. Kelly, director of the Bureau of Information of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, said that artificial birth control is repugnant to the moral sense of men of good will of all nations. "Dr. Fagley's argument," he said, "must be termed 'theologically wrong and ethically weak'."

In his speech Dr. Fagley had said that a "population explosion with disastrous consequences" was in the making in Asia and in other underprivileged areas, and added that the Catholic position on birth control is the "major consideration" causing governments to avoid dealing with population problems. E.P.S., Geneva

Two WCC Homes for Hungarian Refugee Youth Opened in Austria

(Geneva) - Two homes sponsored by the World Council of Churches for Hungarian youth were formally opened in Innsbruck and Attersee, Austria, on April 28 and 29.

The homes, which have been in actual operation for several months, accommodate 110 boys and girls.

Sir Callum Welch, Lord Mayor of London in 1956-57, opened the girls' home at Innsbruck. He was the chairman of the Lord Mayor's Fund for Hungarian Refugees set up in London immediately after the October, 1956, revolution in Hungary. The fund was one of several which helped to buy the house last spring. "In opening this door," he said, "may I say God bless all those who work in this house and may He give courage, fortitude and happiness to all who live in it."

Others taking part in the opening at Innsbruck included Princess Liliane of the Belgians, Dr. Leslie E. Cooke and Dr. Edgar H.S. Chandler, director and associate director of the WCC's Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees.

The 70 girls at the home, whose ages range from 11 to 21, attend the Hungarian Grammar School in Innsbruck. About fifty per cent of the children do not have any relatives in Austria, while most of the others have only one relative there. The children are cared for by two social workers and two youth volunteers.

At Attersee, Chandler House was opened on April 29 by Dr. Chandler, for whom it was named. "I open this home," he said, "with the very deep prayer that every boy who comes here, everyone who works here, may know the blessing and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. We pray that this home may be not only a place of shelter and protection for those who enter here, but that all those who have anything to do with it may grow in Christian fellowship and in those gifts of the spirit - courage, love of freedom and commitment to the service of our fellow-men - which we associate with our faith."

Forty boys between the ages of 15 and 25 have been living in the home since last July. E.P.S., Geneva

French Students Draw Up Algerian Statement

(Bordeaux) - A five-point statement regarding the situation in Algeria has been drawn up by the National Congress of the French Student Christian Movement and presented to the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in France.

Adopted at the French SCM meeting in Bordeaux last month, the statement asked the churches "if in the present circumstances they should not, in the name of Jesus Christ, make clear the special character of the war in Algeria; denounce the weakness of the government which speeds up the process of decay of the French state, especially as a result of the Algerian problem; draw the conclusion that the character of the war and the decay of the state may mean that Christian respect for the state could find its expression in refusal to obey; proclaim our very special solidarity with Christian soldiers called to serve in Algeria who would refuse to obey some orders of their superiors; indicate concretely to church members some limits which in no case should be exceeded in military action."

The students said they had gone on record as supporting soldiers who refused to obey some orders "or would even believe it their duty to refuse absolutely to join their units". E.P.S., Geneva

Fire Destroys LWF Hospital in Jerusalem

(Jerusalem) - A fire on April 25 left half of the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem in ruins. The hospital has been operated for the last eight years by the Lutheran World Federation. No casualties were reported.

Nurses carried babies to safety and all four hundred patients were taken from the hospital. More than 3,000 persons, including 2,000 Jordanian soldiers, fought the fire for seven hours, and troops machine-gunned a water tank on top of the hospital, so that the cascading water would help fight the flames.

The Chapel of the Ascension, attached to the hospital, was badly gutted by the blaze. E.P.S., Geneva

WSCF Holds Executive Meeting

(Oxford) - The first steps toward developing a Student Christian Federation in the Middle East were taken by the Executive Committee of the World's Student Christian Federation at its meeting on April 16-23, at Ripon Hall, near Oxford, England.

The more than forty participants from all over the world approved plans for making contacts with Moslem students as a new step in the WSCF's policy of setting up "regular conversations" with non-Christian student groups.

The committee made plans for the Federation's special project on the "Life and Mission of the Church", which will be carried on between 1958 and 1963. More than a hundred delegates from Asian countries are expected to attend the preparatory conference scheduled from December 28, 1958, to January 8, 1959, in Rangoon. A world-wide conference on the problems and the current methods of the Church's mission is planned for 1960 in the United Kingdom, with 500 participants expected. Follow-up regional conferences are planned for 1961, 1962 and 1963.

The committee agreed that the WSCF needs "radical reorganisation of its structure and methods" to meet current needs. It now has members in more than seventy countries. The committee called for new work to be carried out among teachers in universities, and among students of secondary schools, teacher training colleges and technical institutions.

The appointment of the Rev. Charles Long of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA to the Federation staff was confirmed by the committee. He will have special responsibility for the "Life and Mission of the Church" project. The Rev. Frank Glendenning of the United Kingdom was officially named to work in secondary schools on a part-time basis. The Rev. Robert Bates of the Disciples of Christ in the United States has now joined the Federation staff for work in South East Asia. Plans were also made for the appointment of additional secretaries for work in East Asia and in Africa. E.P.S., Geneva

Mixed Marriages in United Kingdom

(Liverpool) - Marriages between Roman Catholics and non-Roman Catholics in the archdiocese of Liverpool will be celebrated at the high altar in the future, according to orders from Roman Catholic Archbishop Heenan of Liverpool. In the past, mixed marriages have been consecrated at a side altar or in the sacristy.

Pointing out that the decision did not mean he favoured mixed marriages, the Archbishop said he wanted the marriage ceremony to be more dignified, and was especially anxious that non-Catholics should not feel any insult because of a lack of ceremony. E.P.S., Geneva

Technical Assistance Programme Considered by CWS

(New York) - The Executive Committee of Church World Service, relief agency of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, has authorised its executive director to prepare specific plans for a Christian Technical Assistance Programme, designed to help Asia to solve its own problems.

The programme was proposed by Dr. R. Norris Wilson, just back from a visit to the agency's centres in twenty-two countries. He said the programme would enable church groups to make wider use of their experts in agriculture, child care, welfare and handicrafts by lending them to other groups, especially national Christian councils in various Asian nations. E.P.S., Geneva

United Bible Societies Publish Two Studies

(London) - Recent studies by the United Bible Societies are the subjects of two recent publications.

The results of a study on campaigns for the free mass distribution of the Scriptures, prepared by the UBS's former research secretary, Dr. A.M. Chirgwin,

have been published in a booklet, "For Every Man". The survey and analysis provided the background for last summer's statement by the UBS Council that, in the view of the Bible Societies, the Scriptures normally should be sold and not given away. The study also pointed out that campaigns for the mass distribution of the Scriptures are most fruitful when undertaken by the churches themselves.

The spring issue of the quarterly "UBS Bulletin" is almost exclusively devoted to a description and analysis of the biblical renewal in the Roman Catholic Church, and particularly in French-speaking areas. E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

Professor William Manson, well-known Church of Scotland New Testament scholar, died recently. He had taken a prominent part in the Faith and Order movement, and was a former convener of the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the General Assembly.

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Archbishop Jose Cuenca of the Philippines has prohibited Roman Catholics in the Iloilo diocese from participating in YMCA activities. He warned Catholics not to join nor support YMCA activities nor use Y buildings.

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The Basel Mission, Switzerland's oldest Protestant missionary society, has been hailed by a Ghana official for the "profound influence" it has had on the new country's development. Mr. R.A. Quarshie, first secretary of the Ghana Embassy in Paris, said that many Ghana cabinet members "were brought up in the traditions of the Basel mission. We are a secular state and the fact that those of us who are Christian or Mohammedan or hold some other belief can work together so amicably is a tribute to the ideas of toleration instilled by the Basel Mission."

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This year's meeting of the General Synod of the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), scheduled for Eisenach from May 31 to June 5, has been transferred to Berlin. Attempts to get permission from East German authorities to hold the meeting in Eisenach failed.

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The four-man pacifist crew of the ketch, "Golden Rule", were arrested on May 1 at sea off Hawaii. The crew intended to sail the boat into the United States Pacific nuclear testing area in protest against the atomic weapons testing. The four were arrested on charges of criminal contempt of court after disregarding orders of the US Atomic Energy Commission, the Navy, and a court injunction to stay out of the restricted area.

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The Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has granted a subsidy to the Centre for the Protection of the Rights of Conscientious Objectors. Through its representative in the German Federal Government, the Council will advocate that conscientious objectors be permitted to do alternative civilian service outside Germany. E.P.S., Geneva

Report from GermanyDibelius Points Up German Church Problems

(Berlin) - Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin set the stage for the tense and outspoken debate that marked the all-German Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) (see also EPS No. 17) by a review of the main points at issue between Church and state in East Germany.

In the course of his two-hour report, the bishop described in detail how an atheistic "state opposition-church" was being built up in the German Democratic Republic (DDR). The bishop protested vigorously against the way the state was using its power to force the situation. He said the state was exercising pressure on the conscience of children and parents to participate in the Communist-controlled "youth dedication" ceremonies in a way not experienced before.

"It really is a miracle that there are any families left at all which still stand up to this concentrated pressure," said Bishop Dibelius, who is president of the Synod. "The only education available in the German Democratic Republic is given in schools dominated by the religion of materialism."

Drawing attention to the effect on the Church, the veteran bishop warned that "no one must think that a church which experiences such difficulties as those faced by the Church in East Germany therefore ceases to be joyous and hopeful. We are undoubtedly forced into a new form of church life. But the experience of other countries shows that in this new form of church, in which a smaller group of Christians hold to their faith more firmly than before, its life develops unsuspected strength."

On the subject of the basic agreement made last year between the EKD's Synod and the West German government dealing with chaplaincies in the armed forces, the bishop emphasised that application of the agreement was a matter for decision by the individual West German member churches of the EKD. He said the Church regarded it as a duty not to let the soldiers who belonged to the Church lose contact completely with the Christian message.

Stressing that the agreement had not been concluded with NATO but with the West German government, the bishop declared that the offer to conclude a similar pact with the DDR government in the East had been abruptly rejected. Bishop Dibelius referred to a demand from the "church brotherhoods" - groups of pastors and laymen - that the EKD Synod should cancel the agreement and renounce all recourse to atomic weapons (see EPS No. 11). He said that the threat of schism if this demand were not adopted could do no good unless it was absolutely clear that the Bible demanded it.

In part of his address dealing with weapons of mass destruction, the bishop reiterated his support for statements made repeatedly by the EKD and the World Council of Churches calling for the general prohibition of weapons of mass destruction and modern warfare as a whole.

"Weapons of mass destruction must disappear from international life," Bishop Dibelius said. "They must not be used in Germany or anywhere else. In the atomic age there can be no such thing as a 'just war'. Atomic warfare means the mass-murder of the population in other countries and in one's own, and because we reject atomic weapons we must reject war itself... It is the Church's duty to make this challenge heard all over the world: 'War has got to stop!'"

E.P.S., Geneva